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**STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE
AS DELIVERED BY H.E. MSGR. MARIO TOSO, SDB
AT THE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON
TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION
(INCLUDING HUMAN RIGHTS YOUTH EDUCATION)**

Tirana, Albania
21 – 22 May 2013

Opening Session: Combating manifestations of intolerance and discrimination in the OSCE area. Implementation of the relevant OSCE commitments

Mr. Chairman,

The Delegation of the Holy See wishes, in the first place, to express its gratitude to Albania and its Government for generously hosting this High-Level Conference organizing it in such a short time and with a significant dosage of patience. This will be yet another opportunity for the participating States of the OSCE to examine those manifestations of intolerance and discrimination relevant to their consensually agreed commitments. Special thanks and appreciation for their tireless work goes to the OSCE Ukrainian Chairmanship and the ODIHR as well as to all those who have contributed in their own way to the organization and realization of this event of great importance.

Mr. Chairman,

Despite many commitments adopted by the OSCE participating States, there are still many persons and communities, throughout our region, subject to various manifestations of intolerance, discrimination, hostility or violence as a result of their racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity.

At the beginning of this high-Level Conference, the Holy See would like to reiterate the importance of building upon the principles contained in Helsinki Final Act and in other consensually agreed OSCE documents. They form a unique set of tools that are still valid for addressing current security challenges, as well as for the consolidation and preservation of peace and of how to face today's challenges in order to enable present and future generations to live in harmony and security.

In any society, the journey toward achieving more tolerant and less discriminatory coexistence cannot be an isolated venture. The structural and institutional form of a society must be addressed, if effective change is to be achieved. Such responsibility cannot be

relegated to rhetorical statements but should instead be articulated at all levels of action that can be undertaken by a State: within national legislation, the judicial system, the government, the educational system, the media, and faith communities themselves. In the inevitable pluralism that globalization introduces in every society, such concerted effort will bring about positive results.

Mr. Chairman,

While recognizing the importance and contribution of more tolerant and less discriminatory policies and practices, it should be understood that these values are auxiliary to the values of common good and charity as well as to those universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms. To give absolute character to tolerance and non-discrimination means to turn them into a supreme value, relativizing and diminishing the truth and the value of the common good. The renunciation of truth, in turn, exposes man to the calculation of the fittest, or to immediate profit, depriving the person of his or her dignity.

While we will be focusing on various manifestations of intolerance and discrimination, my Delegation wishes to give particular attention to worrying trends of religious intolerance emerging and growing in various forms throughout the OSCE area. In this context, allow me, Mr. Chairman, to remind the distinguished participants of an important anniversary which occurred less than a month ago and that is 20 years of Blessed John Paul II's visit to Albania in 1993. In his address to the Albanian nation on 25 April 1993 in Skanderbeg Square, His Holiness affirmed:

Religious freedom is not only a precious gift of God to those who have the grace of faith, it is rather a gift for everyone, because it is the main guarantee of every other expression of freedom. It touches man within his very being, in the inviolable sanctum which is his conscience, where the human being meets with his or her Creator and acquires full awareness of his or her own dignity. This freedom, when it is used properly, does not risk causing any social disorder. Sincere faith, in fact, does not divide people, but unites them, despite their differences. Nothing like faith reminds us that if we have one and the same Creator, we are all brothers! Religious freedom is thus a safeguard against totalitarianism and a decisive contribution to human fraternity. True religious freedom shuns temptations of intolerance and sectarianism, and promotes attitudes of respectful and constructive dialogue.

With this in mind, Mr. Chairman, the Delegation of the Holy See is looking forward to giving its own contribution to the discussions and exchange of thoughts and experiences that we will share over these two days.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman!